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ABSTRACT

The administration of Rochester Community Schools (Michigan) initiated a process for long-range strategic planning in 1984, described in this synopsis. Strategic planning is an ongoing, evolutionary process of defining the business one is in or should be in; establishing organizational goals and objectives; and developing and implementing strategies for future goals. The result is a blueprint of how to achieve school district goals and objectives. The plan evolved from existing structures to be congruent with district and community needs. Establishment of a superintendent's cabinet with advisory group was Rochester's only management structural change. Other divisions had advisory councils to assist executive staff. The plan began with creation of the district's guidance system. Ten "Key Result Areas" characteristic of a quality educational institution were developed. Using key areas and the mission statment, the superintendent's cabinet analyzed internal and external factors with potential effects on individuals and programs. Once approved, long-range goals were assigned objectives and strategies. Objectives are evaluated yearly and given a trial period. All staff participate in daily problem solving and operational objectives. As a result, the district can focus on implications of current decisions and identify potential opportunities and problems. (CJH)

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LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLANNING: THE ROCHESTER EXPERIENCE

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Summary of a presentation made by Dr. Schultz at the American Association of School Administrators at the 1986 Convention, San Francisco

February 24, 1986

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LONG - RANGE STRATEGIC PLANNING
The Rochester Experience

Rochester Community Schools
Rochester, Michigan

In 1984, the administration of the Rochester Community Schools initiated a process for long-range strategic planning. The purpose of this document is to provide a synopsis of Rochester's experience in response to requests for information from other educational insitutions. The following is not intended as the formula for solving the problems of school districts. Rather, it provides one example for school districts to examine in the pursuit of excellence in the business of education.

TYPES OF PLANNING

Not unlike many other organizations, Rochester Community Schools functioned primarily in a problem-solving mode prior to 1983. This type of planning is designed to restore performance to a routine level, and tends to cover a time span of one to three months. There is a high level of risk involved in this form of planning.

Annual (Operational) planning existed predominantly on paper.

In a desire to contain the amount of crisis to crisis management within the district, and to provide assurances for a preferred future, Dr. John M. Schultz, Superintendent of Schools, began investigating a process which was receiving considerable attention in business and industry: long-range strategic planning.

Following an extensive review of available literature on the subject, Dr. Schultz defined long-range planning as a view to the next three to five years, and strategic planning as:

a continuous and disciplined process of defining what business we are in, or should be in; establishing specific goals and objectives relating to the organization; developing and implementing action plans (strategies) to steer the organization from where it is to where it has determined that it wants to be in the future.

Further, the process of long-range strategic planning is seen as action oriented involving participation of administration and the Board of Education.

The result of long-range strategic planning is a blueprint of how to achieve the goals and objectives of the school district.

The final outcome of the Long-Range Strategic Plan is the attainment of the District's mission.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN

To be successful, Rochester's Long-Range Strategic Plan had to be congruent with the needs of the District and the community. The plan had to evolve naturally from existing structures as they were perceived by by staff and the Board.

The only management structural change of long-range strategic planning was the establishment of the Superintendent's Cabinet. Both the Operational Division and the Instructional Division had advisory councils functioning to assist executive staff in decision making. The creation of the Superintendent's Cabinet provided an advisory group which defines and analyzes issues generic to the District and community.

Thus it is the Cabinet which strives for an effective balance between creative and analytical thinking so that an optimum effort is concentrated on the needs of the community and District, subsequently defining goals and objectives to be accomplished over a three to five year period.

Strategic Plan, the Divisions for Operational Management and Instruction continue to develop and implement program plans, and individual departments and buildings continue to function in day-to-day decision making modes. The effect of the Long-Range Plan is the assurance that individual and small group plans and decisions are congruent with the goals and mission of the District.

Prior to Long-Range Strategic Planning it was not unusual for various departments to be working on equally well thoughtout plans, which would ultimately pull the district in opposite directions.

THE DISTRICT'S GUIDANCE SYSTEM

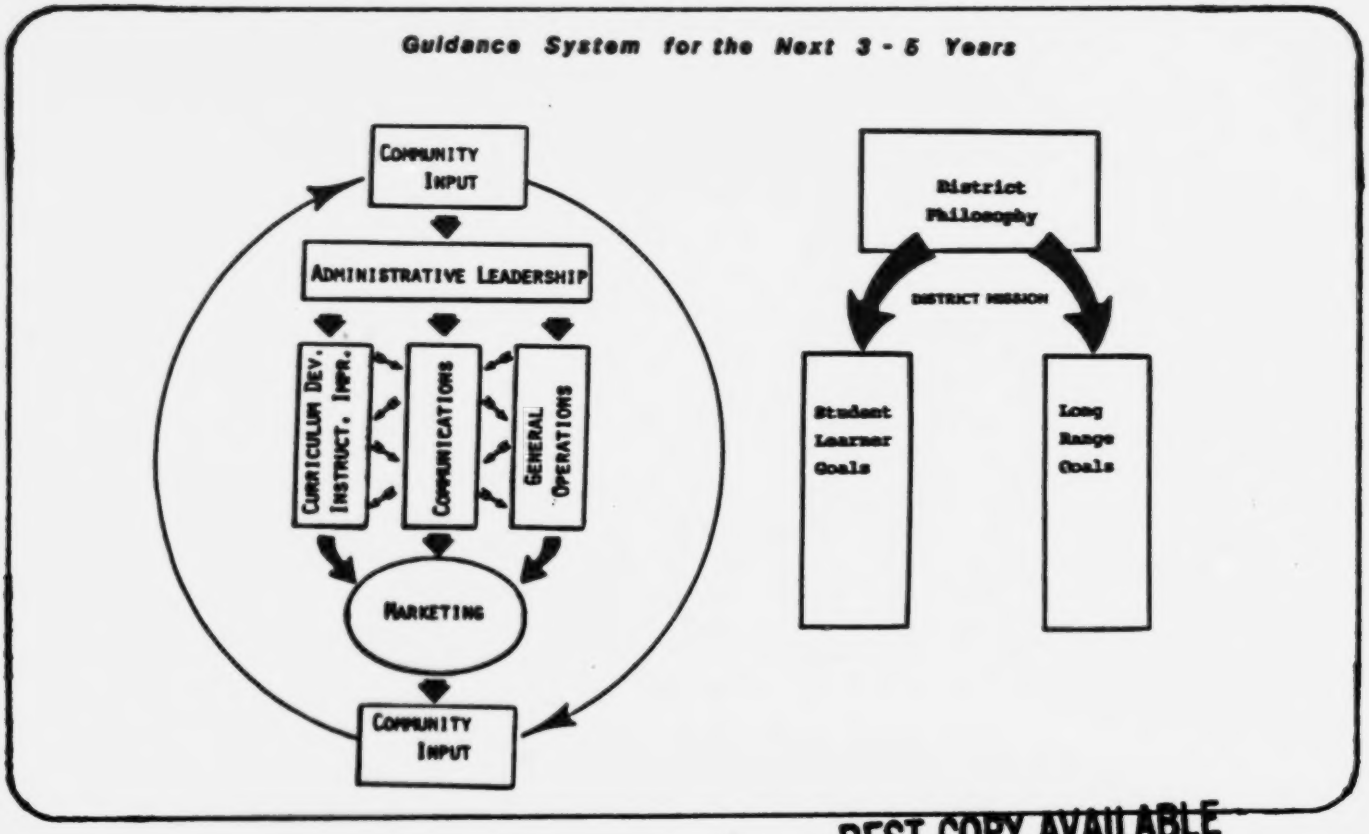
The development of the Long-Range Strategic Plan began with the development of the District's Guidance System which is depicted in Figure 1.

The school system starts with the Community and its needs which are communicated through the Board and the Administration. As a result, District leadership develops action plans for instructional and operational programs oversees the critical components of internal and external communications which manifest themselves through marketing. The Marketing Program directs the flow of information back to the community-at-large and, thus, completes as well as reinitiates the cycle.

The right hand side of the paradigm (Figure 1)was incomplete at the point when the strategic planning process was initiated. The District Philosophy and Learner Goals had been written by a committee of teachers, community members, administrators and representatives from the Board of Education. The completion of the Mission Statement became the first task of the Superintendent's Cabinet.

"Long-Range Goals" represent the means to which the District actualized the Mission and Student Learner Goals. The Long-Range Strategic Plan is considered to be integral to the Guidance System: the functioning integration of all the components depicted in the paradigm.

Figure 1



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There is a close relationship between the District's Guidance System and Key Result Areas of the Long-Range Strategic Plan. Key Result Areas are considered to be characteristic of a quality educational institution. Although independent, Key Result Areas are closely interrelated. Performance and results in any of these areas directly and vitally affects the survival and growth of the school organization. The Key Result Areas (ten) are:

1. **Student Learning and Growth:** Learning refers to the modification and/or change in student behavior in the cognitive domain. Growth refers to changes in the affective and psychomotor domains.

2. **Financial Resources:** Refers to the funds (local, state, and federal) that are available to support the cost associated with the school district's programs and services.

3. **Physical Resources:** Refers to the capital facilities, buildings, equipment, machines, and grounds that are needed to support the district's programs and services.

4. **Innovations:** Refers to innovations that apply to all Key Result Areas. It refers to goals that are designed to improve each Key Result Area.

5. **Community Involvement and Relations:** Refers to the involvement of the community in the educational process and keeping the public-at-large involved in the various operations of the school organization.

6. **Organizational Management:** Refers to improvement of the school district through positive administrative leadership and organizational structure. It applies to central administration as well as building-level administration.

7. **Marketing:** Refers to a continuous process that affects everything a school district does. It is a 90-7-3 concept of communications.

a. Ninety percent of the schools image is who the people are and what they do 24 hours a day. How school what they say are key factors in marketing.

b. Seven percent of marketing is listening; tuning in to find out what people like, don't like, want, don't want. Anything the school personnel do to know more about the "customers."

c. Three percent of marketing is outbound communications: publications, posters, news releases, and other visible and tangible items.

8. **Instructional Programs and Services:** Refers to professional staff and their delivery system; the curriculum (materials, textbooks, content) that is designed to improve the quality of student learning and growth.

9. **Performance Training and Evaluation:** Refers to the means to improve staff through a variety of training and development activities.

10. **Operational Programs and Services:** Refers to noninstructional staff, their programs and services that are designed to improve support systems for the school district.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Utlizing the Philosophy, Mission Statement and the ten Key Result Areas, the Superintendent's Cabinet conducted a critical analysis of internal and external factors which had the potential for impacting the school District's programs and services. Information sources included: a profile of the Rochester student, community and staff survey information, enrollment data financial data, communications with district parents and community agencies. (See Figure 2).

The outcome of the analysis resulted in planning assumptions i.e. predictions of the events and conditions which were most likely to influence the performance of individuals, departments, schools, and the district as a whole. From assumptions, the Cabinet developed a view of what the future would be without planned intervention. This scenario was examined in terms of

SWOTs: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that were perceived to change the scenario from what would be to what should be. This resulted in the development of Long-Range Goals for Key Result Areas.

Once the Long-Range goals were developed and approved by the Board of Education, Objectives and strategies were written for each Goal which would lead to its attainment. Each year objectives are prioritized and those which appear to be the most appropriate and feasible to attain in a given twelve month period are chosen as the Operational Objectives for the fiscal year.

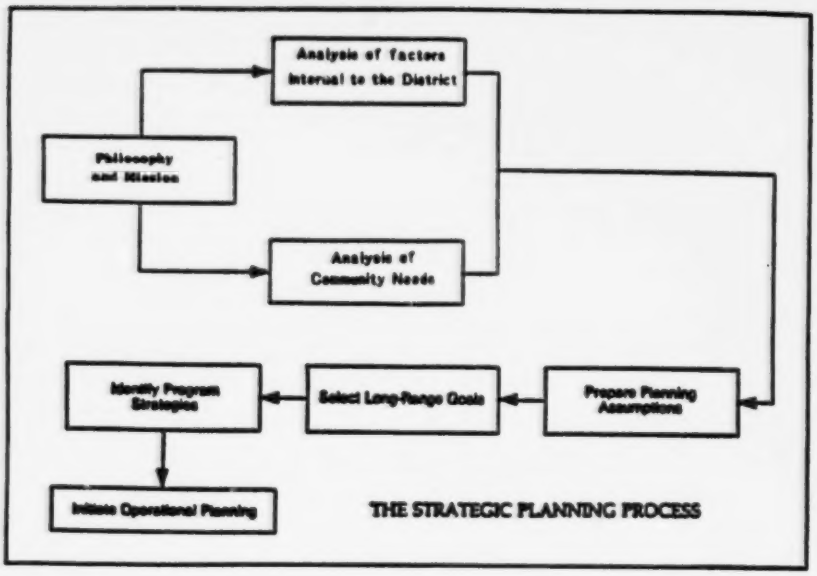

FIGURE 2

This step initiates Operational Planning. Individuals and/or groups are assigned to each Operational Objective. Action Plans are written for their attainment and approved by the Cabinet which becomes the monitoring agent for their completion.

The District functions in all three levels of planning simutaneously. As the Cabinet monitors SWOTs and the progress toward completion of a given year's Operational Objectives, long-range strategic planning is in full operation.

As staff engage in attaining Operational Objectives, annual planning is in force.

The Total staff participates in day-to-day problem solving as they complete their job functions.

THE MONITORING PROCESS

The ongoing evolutionary nature of the Long-Range Strategic Plan is a critical concept. The process continues as the analysis phase becomes an ongoing activity of the Cabinet's monitoring function. Through constant examination of information, the Cabinet will keep the Strategic Plan current within the context of current educational trends and community needs. As the District attains each Long-Range Goal, new goals will be developed. As each year passes a new year will be added to the five year calendar, thus preserving the longevity of the plan.

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS:

As a result of the strategic planning process, the District will:

1. Force greater attention to be placed on future implications of today's decisions.
2. Enable the district to identify and prepare for decisions which must be made in the future.
3. Help the district to identify potential opportunities and threats, and reduce risk by implementing strategies to deal with them.
4. Promote a philosophy of action rather than reaction.

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